LSA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIBRARY SYSTEMS

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I was asked (and how could I have thought last summer I could do it?) to analyze and forecast the different directions library system development resulting from the Library Services Act has taken and is likely to take in different states and in different parts of the country, together with the underlying reasons for such differences. Is consolidation the answer? Or cooperation? Or federation? What is the (proper) role of the local library in larger systems? What are the effects of LSA to date on this role? Indeed, what is the future of the local library--its collection, its staff, its services? In short, what has happened, what can, will, or should happen in larger-unit development as state agencies, LSA funds, and local and regional libraries join forces?

These were the questions asked, probably answerable only by the most careful study of each of the state plans, followed by on-the-scene observation, and analysis of what has been and will be done with the plans, in every area where any of the funds have gone and will be used. This is quite beyond my West Coast reach. From partial knowledge of state plans, and extremely limited observation of what has been done with them, I shall try to make a few comments on the questions raised.

The underlying thought of this paper is the need for money to develop public libraries through systems, and for any significant effect on the improvement of the services and operations of small libraries. Emerson said 120 years ago: "Money, which represents the prose of life and which is hardly spoken of in parlors without an apology, is in its effects and laws as beautiful as roses." Without apologies, may I say that the one ingredient not previously in the picture that has stimulated whatever has been accomplished through LSA is money. And

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I look ahead with some anxiety to the possible termination of the federal money, because in my own state, and in nearly half the states, we have not yet obtained anything to take its place. Nothing, that is, to take the place of the "outside" money that is the stimulant to action and the glue that holds system-wide services of many pre-existing independent local libraries together in newly created systems, unless such libraries have completely changed their organization and government to consolidate. Even with consolidation, the level of service will have to be lower than it could be if outside funds continue to be part of the financial support.

We were told when we were asked to speak here that it was hoped we would abandon the "glad tidings, good news" approach in favor of a close and critical look at the total impact of LSA. I hope we can do this, hard as it is, apparently by both nature and habit, for librarians.

Slightly less than half the states, among them California, still have no state financial grants-in-aid, and where we have started LSA programs that depend for continuance--or continuance at no lower level of service--on more than local appropriations, we are quite unsure of the future. We are literally doing a certain amount of gambling and the game isn't over.

It is useful in trying to analyze and forecast LSA's effect on the development of larger units of library service and on the role of the small local library, to go back to what the Public Library Inquiry found as the pattern of public libraries six years before LSA began. The last chapter of The Public Library in the United States, "The Direction of Development," made some cautious indications of development for the decade ahead, the decade that has now passed. We were advised that it is in the nature of social science inquiry to emphasize analysis of the present and past institutional structure and performance, but to be cautious about predicting the shape of things to come. We were told, therefore, to "look elsewhere for those pictures of library utopias which, although they may provide much needed inspiration for the day's work, are not constructed out of actual probabilities, trends, and achievements."[1]

Half the incorporated places were too small or too poor to have any public library, and likewise two-thirds of the people in unincorporated areas were without direct library service. All but a tenth of the existing library units were so small or so poor that they could not by themselves either assemble a large enough stock of books and other materials or support the trained personnel to constitute a modern public library service as de-

fined by the official objectives.

I cannot give you, because I do not know, the 1961 nationwide facts about these 1950 conditions. John Lorenz' office reports that state funds for rural public library service have increased 75 per cent since 1956, and local appropriations for rural libraries have increased 50 per cent since that date.

The past decade has provided several major stimuli, with national impact on public library development: (1) New York's program of conditional grants of substantial funds for the purpose of creating large library systems; (2) the adoption of the 1953 Public Library Service Standards for California; (3) in 1956, two major events in public library history and development, the adoption of the new public library standards by the American Library Association and the passage by Congress of the Library Services Act. Now, five more years have passed, and the availability of LSA money has stimulated, forced--there is no other way to obtain it--the most widespread planning for public library service that has ever occurred. This illustrates the power of money, even a relatively small amount!

The state plans under the Library Services Act show that most states incorporated the library system concept into their plans, and, in various ways, LSA projects are pointed in the direction of larger units of library service. Some genuine larger units of library service have actually been created which come close in many respects to meeting the 1956 ALA public library standards, notably the well-demonstrated and hard-won five-county, 15,000-square-mile Columbia River Regional Library in Washington State. This was a brilliant demonstration of the wisdom in that case of putting all a state's "eggs"--LSA dollars--in one basket. Maryan Reynolds, Washington State Librarian, is here, and time would be well spent in having her tell of this.

The Library Services Branch reported in January 1961 that library service has for the first time reached one and one-half million people, and substantial improvements in existing service have been made for eight million more people. This is assumed to have been done largely through county and regional library developments, or "larger units of library service," although I am not sure from the information I found available. How many such systems, and the "size" and viability of these systems, we do not yet know. All this will require analysis that undoubtedly will be made by the Library Services Branch.

What has been the effect on the small local library? With far from complete information, it seems to be different

in different states, which is about the only solid, sure piece of information I can offer. Every state has had to decide whether to use the LSA funds in areas where little or no local service existed, or in improving existing programs. The choice has depended on many things, and we shall have some of both in many states, given more time. The first thought is often to use the money in areas without any service, and this may or may not be the best choice.

There are frequently times when it seems easier and far more appealing, because it offers something for everyone where nothing has existed, to attempt to create viable larger units of library service where there has been no library service. The very effort to improve existing service is, in the minds of some of those responsible for the status quo, an indictment of them and is resented and often resisted. Where no local library exists, effort can be concentrated wholly on the people whom the library system is planned to serve. We neither have to combat the image of some poor service which people have experienced and which is their only criterion, nor do we have to overcome the indifference of people who consider what they have to be good enough. In other words, there is more "hunger" for library service--the best obtainable--and we can set our goals higher. But this is not the basis on which choices of demonstration areas and programs are made. We all know that, as we choose areas on which to concentrate for library development, a great many factors come together and eventually determine the choice. Expression of local interest, along with the strength and determination of local leadership, has a great deal to do with it. In each kind of area, there are obstacles which must be planned for and worked around, if not overcome. Some kind of local library usually exists wherever people live in groups, and it is good when we can build on what exists. Fortunately, some local libraries are aware of the greater needs and are, as they should be, the nucleus for building systems.

Insofar as I have been able to examine recent state reports, the printed summaries from the Library Services Branch and publications of state libraries and library associations, there has been considerable building on the local existing libraries, in many places accompanied by placing the library on public tax support for the first time. Library laws and general laws frequently make it necessary to start this way, as the first step to the later formation of a larger system, but the greatest possible effort should be made to have it understood that this is only the first step and to prepare for the next step.

The size of the local existing library seems to make a difference in whether it will join up with the new larger unit. I can't define the point in size when the possibility of actual consolidation becomes less likely, but I am not aware of consolidation occurring voluntarily in the cases of quite large existing libraries. The exception of Buffalo and Erie County comes to mind, and I understand that was not a spontaneous, voluntary choice, but forced by a special tax situation and later greatly strengthened and expanded by New York's grants-in-aid program. By far the larger number of outright consolidations of incorporated towns or cities with county library service in California occurred decades ago when either no tax-supported libraries existed in the places then incorporated, or whatever libraries did exist were very small, and vested interests had not taken deep root.

I do not expect anything like 100 per cent agreement when I say that this seems to indicate little prospect of consolidation of long-existing local libraries into systems, especially when there is what seems to be a considerable investment visible in the local institution. I will maintain that to bring about much consolidation requires a skill in logic plus persuasion superior to that most of us have. I can point to only two or three such consolidations which I believe I caused to be made--and one of those fell apart when there was a change of librarians. Logic in that instance is still on the side of the consolidation, but, as one librarian said of the breakup, "Librarians can't meet their own projected plans, as too many will destroy something to assure they have a private mud pie." All of which raises questions about the percentage of true professionalism among librarians.

Yet nothing seems to be black or white in this business, but streaked or gray. The library system that wanted to continue the consolidation, but couldn't because of the reneging partner, now has its own professional head and staff, and the new head librarian says although she would have liked to continue the consolidation, her area is delighted that they now have their "own" librarian again, because under consolidation the head didn't live in the center of their own area. Perhaps, after all, this shows that we are dealing with humans and human nature, with all their whims, wishes, likes, and dislikes, and somehow we have to adjust to these and recognize our own share in these same characteristics. Well, to sum up, all the people in that region are spending more but getting less in an effort to maintain the higher level of service to which they became accustomed during the consolidation.

Before one dismisses consolidation as the single bright hope of the future for public library development, it should be said that tax and financial stringencies may bring more of it about than now seems probable. It should also be considered that some of the apathy that exists in some of our present consolidated systems probably springs from too long ignoring the values of lively local participation in the plans and support of local community libraries that have long been part of consolidated libraries. I hope we are waking up in time to this. Of course, it is easier for the central administrator to administer the consolidated system, on the level of pure administration, but there are wellsprings of growth, adaptation, and variation in local communities that are great sources of strength to the library system. Robert Leigh said in 1950 in The Public Library in the United States,

> The emphasis in public library organization thus far [speaking of the nation as a whole] has been on local initiative, citizen participation, adaptation of the service to the variant interests and conditions of different communities. There has been little attempt to gain the inherent economies and efficiencies of larger units in technical operations and in use of skilled personnel or by centralization to reduce the inequalities of service resulting from uneven distribution of population and economic resources. It is one of the assumptions of the Inquiry that in a large-scale modern democratic, industrial society there are advantages both in local initiative and participation and in larger units of administration; that neither should be neglected, but that governmental structure should be contrived to give the greatest possible scope to both principles.[2]

I was reminded of some neglect on the local participation side of this combination recently when I read the comment of an early California county librarian, who administered a consolidated system, "I was accustomed to a board of supervisors who neither helped nor interfered." "Neither helped nor interfered" was not enough to keep the system vital, strong, and unified; that system split into city and county libraries many years ago, and we are still trying to put them back together again, with by no means assured success. If we do succeed, it will be with the creation of advisory citizen library commissions to participate in the planning and development of the re-unified system. They won't come together any other way, nor do we think they should. We have a rather large number of city split-offs from county systems, in the most popu-

lous areas, and the recent creation of local community advisory groups, by appointment of the county board of supervisors, is seen as a means of slowing down this trend, stopping it wherever possible, and obtaining greater local community interest in and understanding of the values of a larger system.

California, which of all the states probably has the lowest percentage of public libraries with boards of trustees, has not proved that the absence of library boards, and having library administrators directly responsible to elected officials or appointed general administrators, guarantees a better library. That statement should be qualified by pointing out the obvious fact that practically everything depends on the quality of the officials, the administrators, the library board members, and the librarians. But there can be no gainsaying that active, intelligent local interest in the welfare of the library by citizens and citizen groups is essential. As we know, library boards can sometimes lose awareness, or fail ever to gain it, of their proper functions and responsibilities. They can become tax and local-autonomy watchdogs, confusing their roles with those of other officials. The library scene is strewn with situations all but moribund through their indifference or all but choked through their overinterference. We believe that it is worth practically any effort to try to enliven that kind of situation or improve it, for trustee and citizen interest in library development must be obtained if we are ever to fulfill the objectives of the public library.

Well, then, what of cooperation? Who could be against it? Too loosely defined and practiced, however, it usually accomplished almost nothing except to maintain a vague good will without tangible results in library improvement. But, add some money to the cooperative good will, and make a specific plan for new and improved services not possible without cooperation, and the word "cooperation" loses its vagueness and begins to express its true meaning, "acting or operating jointly with another or others."

In some states, "cooperative library system" is a legal entity and is undergirded not only by a legal foundation but also by grants of state funds to finance the larger operations which can better be performed on a systemwide basis. In this sense, the promise of cooperation for library development is considerable. In fact, we see this as a major direction of development among the small and small-to-medium-sized libraries in California. Yet, our shining example of such a cooperative library system demonstration, the 16 libraries in six counties that have formed the North Bay Cooperative Library System, will

be in grave danger of collapse to little of anything more than a central processing center for the 16 separate libraries if we are again unsuccessful in obtaining state financial grants-in-aid from the State Legislature in the next two years. Incidentally, we believe that no amount of logic or persuasion could have persuaded the officials of those 16 cities, counties, and districts to enter into a consolidation agreement, nor is it possible to see how the service could have been as much improved as it has been under the present arrangement, if they had consolidated.

What of federation? We lack an exact definition of this term, one that could be uniformly understood to mean a certain kind of library system throughout the United States. If I took the time to describe the organization of the North Bay Cooperative Library System in California, I think you would probably tell me that it is a federated system. I would agree with you. The terminology really doesn't seem very important; the operation and the service which the system produces <u>are</u> important. The libraries in that group apparently liked the sound of "cooperative" better than "federated" when they selected their name. Since they are located in a sort of geographic crescent around the north reaches of San Francisco Bay, they started out to call their system the Fertile Crescent Library System, in tribute to the rich agricultural and productive resources of the area, but that title soon fell by the wayside in favor of North Bay Cooperative.

In looking over the recent five-year summaries prepared by states for the Library Services Branch, one notices that the things which seem to count for most in influencing local library agencies and state agencies to add funds to those of the federal LSA program are of two types, tangible and intangible. The tangible things include the special surveys made with LSA funds like those of Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Wisconsin; bookmobiles; book collections improved both in content and appearance; added nonbook materials such as films and records; more and better-trained staff; communications systems such as telephone and teletype; publications both for professional information and for public relations. Less tangible but equally effective, if not more so, in obtaining support, as shown by the reports, are the myriad increases in personal contacts and communication between state library agencies and local librarians and other citizens, librarians with branch library staffs, library trustees with their librarians, library trustees with each other, and groups of librarians working with each other, all of which are neces-

sary for the establishment and operation of larger units of library service. There seems to be an increase in the general vitality of numerous libraries which were not active before. All this has resulted in stimulation of local use of libraries, an improved public attitude toward libraries, and an increased awareness of the value of libraries on the part of some citizens and legislators at local and state levels as well as in the Congress.

Let us not assume from this brief note of optimism that the job that remains to be done does not dwarf all that has been done thus far. And what has been done can fall apart if we do not have money to carry on. I refuse to admit that we should not have gambled, or that we should have used the money only for programs that could surely be carried on with local funds alone in case state funds are not forthcoming soon. Hard as it may be to lose the gamble in some cases, it seems better to demonstrate service of a quality which will justify the assumption of a proper share of support by government at all levels.

We can see that the forces joined together by the Library Services Act have in some places stimulated strong interest and activity in bettering service to the public through the small library by encouraging the coordination of that library's program with a larger system. This is particularly true in the area of book selection and the development of book collections which are, of course, essentially the core of service. This is especially important today when the recognition of solid learning is assuming more importance in people's lives. A recent report of the Stanford Research Institute stated that by the late 1960's and early 1970's America's status symbols will have changed completely from automobiles and all the other current status symbols to knowledge and intellectual achievement. It will still require personal ability and effort for such intellectual achievement, and to this the public library can contribute in no small measure by developing good information and reference services. The ability of a small public library to develop these services locally is directly related to whether it has access to the kind of book collection and the type of service which a larger and stronger unit can provide. The flexibility of the LSA permits such access.

I do not see, in some of the programs, as much emphasis on reference and information services as there should be to make the public library the uniquely reliable source in this area. I believe that we should concentrate more on this function, even in the smallest kind of project. Our rural and small

town service in the past has been too much a popular circulation service and has not commanded the respect and support it would command if it had proved that it could meet the test of constantly providing needed information and reference service. This is a difficult kind of project to develop, particularly when, to get it started, we must more or less superimpose it on a group of independent libraries that have paid little attention to it in the past. New systems should build in, from the very beginning, the best possible reference and information service, and not wait to add it later. Of course, this is a relatively expensive service, in unit cost, and we are not sure local governments will pick up the tab.

Processing centers are another difficult operation to carry on for groups of independent, "cooperative," or "federated" libraries. It is far easier to perform central processing in a consolidated system. Central processing is still worthwhile, even where consolidation is impossible, because separate processing takes proportionately too large blocks of time in libraries that can least afford this time and money. It is a largely mechanical process that can be centralized with almost no fear of loss of autonomy. Thus, it seems only sensible that small libraries be given the opportunity to relieve themselves from the "busyness" of circulation detail and cataloging and processing detail, to devote their time and talent to serving the public. This can best be done by utilizing the procedures and the operations of a larger system that has been able to develop new ways, methods, and equipment to do this work.

All of our projects should be studied and made to contribute as substantially as possible to the objectives of a richer, deeper, and wider book and information service, and an efficient performance of the mechanical library functions. This seems to me the ultimate test of what we do.

What of the future? I trust we are not deluding ourselves in believing there is wide acceptance of the larger-system concept among librarians, even though it is little more than lip service in some cases. It is true that a number of local small libraries still view this concept as a threat rather than as what we believe to be their golden opportunity; but if money to support interlibrary cooperation (or federation, or, where appropriate, consolidation) is made available, I believe these doubters will be much in the minority. The citizens to whom these libraries are responsible will not allow them to remain isolated and weak. Some will not in our lifetime change; most will--but the money has to come from somewhere.

If the plans of public libraries as expressed in meetings, workshops, institutes, and conferences over the past several decades were reviewed, we would find an almost universal pattern of continued emphasis on cooperation in one form or another. In 1955 when I was the president of the California Library Association and the annual conference was held in San Jose, I was preparing a few opening remarks for the local hosts. I reviewed the list of past meetings and found CLA had last met in San Jose some 35 or more years earlier. Curious, I looked up the theme, to compare it with the theme of Interlibrary Cooperation chosen for the 1955 Conference. The wording varied only slightly. The earlier conference in the same place had as its theme, Library Cooperation! Much of the same ground had been covered. The discouraging thing was that there had been few outstanding accomplishments in the intervening years. Many feeble attempts at cooperation had been made, but, without funds to support the expenses of establishing cooperative enterprises and some continuing money to maintain the structure of functional consolidation or cooperation, these attempts had had little influence on the organization and level of service.

Librarians during the intervening years were no more lacking in imagination and creative ability than we are today when we are bringing into being a number of going systems of cooperation. In those years, many plans were drawn up, discussed, and hopefully taken home from workshops and meetings, but nothing happened except some quite useful union lists of materials that cost little. The difference is--today we have some money, thanks to LSA.

In 1958, we held a workshop on problems of library service in metropolitan areas. Preliminary working plans were drawn up; concentrated work was done on the plans by well-qualified people. If good planning had been enough to get cooperative systems off the ground in metropolitan areas, we would have these systems now. But we do not have them. One of the plans was for the Greater Sacramento area. It could, with slight modifications, have been put into effect, but it required some initial investment, not much, but, without state or federal aid, neither the county nor the city could pick itself up and even consider actually implementing such a plan. If money had been available for integration grants, with no rural definition restrictions, we might have an integrated or cooperative system in California's capital area today. There is little doubt that Sacramento County and City could have afforded this plan, maybe even continued it, largely on their own

resources, but, without some money that did not have to come directly out of the local property tax, the work of the group that developed the Sacramento Plan was largely an exercise in plan-making. The other really good plans that were worked out for metropolitan areas have fared similarly. I hope they are only temporarily shelved and will be taken off the shelf and dusted up for action when some state grants-in-aid are provided.

An earlier workshop on the mechanics of library cooperation produced the beginnings of a plan for a centralized processing center. Libraries in northeastern California were interested, would have cooperated immediately, but there were no funds for setting it up. Years of talk and no action intervened, but when the Library Services Act was passed, the plans came to life and reality, and through much tribulation and experimentation, there is now a working Processing Center, beginning now to be partially supported by the 20 libraries in the 12 or so counties it serves, with prospect of complete local support ahead.

In another workshop, again on library cooperation, the plan of the North Bay Cooperative Library System developed, and that had quicker results, because the increased appropriation for the Library Services Act became available. Thus, this cooperative plan went into action almost immediately--or as immediately as anything can when cities, counties, districts, and the state and federal governments are all involved.

Another effect of the availability of money through LSA is that it stimulates planning. A plan must be developed before any funds can be granted. Everyone plans in his head, and expects to do more thorough planning sometime, but few libraries really work out a plan on paper, stating where they are going and how they are going to reach their goals. With LSA in existence, this must be done, both for the state to obtain the federal funds, and again for the locality to obtain the funds from the state for local use. Then, when the money is granted, it must be used according to that plan to accomplish the goals that were set up. The clear implication of LSA forces libraries to work out plans by which they can cooperate with other libraries. They are motivated by a direct reward for working out such plans, and this is high motivation. Thus, librarians are free to work out plans and the many problems that must be solved, unhampered by the basic question, "Where is the money coming from?"

This is a machine age in which numerous operations are becoming automated. Libraries should keep pace and,

wherever suitable, make machine operations serve the cause of improved library service. Teletype is essential to some types of systems, Flexowriters, multilith, Xerox, or some type of reproducing equipment are all vital to centralized processing in cooperative systems, and rapid copying is a "must" for modern library service, to mention only a few mechanical aids. How are these acquired? With money. Justification is needed, but not too difficult to supply when the need is obvious. These machines are not frills; today they are the essentials of communication and supply of materials. They make more difference than the typewriter did when it replaced hand copying. Station wagons, bookmobiles, trucks, and other automotive equipment are also essential--and also cost money. Both the communications and transportation equipment help overcome time and distance, to bring books and services quickly to people. Our plans must include them, and the money must come from somewhere.

Plans show that we have ventured a little into the field of scholarships to prepare more and better professional library personnel, without whom little progress can be made. We have not yet really experienced maximum benefit from these scholarships, partly because the recipients go into the best-paying and already best-supported rural library systems. We still have few qualified people to go into the really rural areas and develop systems, and we are not likely to have more until there is state financial aid to enable such areas to pay salaries that will attract them. Otherwise, we may have to narrow the obligations of scholarship recipients, but if we do, will we have enough applicants?

The money must come from somewhere for more research in the development of library systems. We had a research study of affiliated libraries under way at the California State Library. It was not directly financed by federal funds, but it was made possible because we had more library consultants than ever before. It was not completed, because we lost Dorothy Sinclair back to Enoch Pratt Library, but we do have some of the results of her work. If we had many more such careful studies as the underpinning for public library development and planning, the money would be more readily obtained, for justifications would be more scientifically prepared.

What has happened, what can, will, or should happen in larger-unit development as state agencies, LSA funds, and local and regional libraries join forces? We <u>should</u> achieve modern public library service for all the United States. It is entirely possible now to overcome time and distance with know-

ledge and equipment already in existence. We also have rational standards for public library service. But the money--more money--has to come from somewhere. It is not a large amount; it is indeed a tiny amount compared with other major public services.

Broader and more diversified sources of tax support are needed. Only last week the League of California Cities was told that "the property tax means of financing government is loaded with shortcomings. As many writers on government finance point out, it is wrong in theory, doesn't work in practice and has little to commend it except its age." State libraries alone cannot obtain the broader support, important though their key roles are in statewide library development. Strong professional library associations, mobilizing trustees and other lay groups, will have to obtain the financial support for statewide programs.

Finally, I grant that money is not everything; librarians are required--librarians with the imagination, the skill, and the cooperative ability to see the possibilities of modern public library service and to bring it about. Judging by past speed in accomplishments, we may not live to see modern public library service all over America, but I hope the acceleration characteristic of so much of recent modern life will also take hold of us in the library profession to get the job done. In the last analysis, however, money is an essential ingredient, and it has to come from all levels of government.

References

1. Leigh, Robert D. The Public Library in the United States. New York, Columbia University Press, 1950, p. 241.

2. Ibid., p. 227.